



The Centrality of the First Year Student Experience

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A planning perspective

University of Botswana:

- 13,844 students (2008/9)
- 10,410 full-time
- Falling numbers from 11,312 in 2006/7
 - Why?
 - Market
 - Competition
 - Student persistence factors



Issues of student persistence

- Student experience felt to be critical to success
- Student integration Model (Tinto, 1975, 1993; et al)
- Persistence factors
 - Retention
 - Providing the right experience
- At UB retention is high/dropout low; but proxies include time to completion; failure rates etc



Key statistics on persistence issues

- 2008: 31% of students in a 5th year of study; 9% in a 6th year (of 4 year programmes)
- 2007: 10.4% failed a 1st year course (random sample)
- Large numbers carrying failure into subsequent years
- Many not taking a 'full year worth' of courses



What does the literature tell us?

- “The first year of university study remains arguably the most critical time for engaging students with their learning community and...the requisite skills to not only persist but to be successful and independent in their learning throughout the undergraduate years and beyond” (Krause, 2005).



Effect of student attrition

- UK – 22% dropout steady for last 5 years: large cost
- South Africa 20%
- UB the proxy for dropout is time to progression in persistence through the system:
 - Cost to government in subsidy and fee
 - Clogging/restrictions on intakes
 - Loss to students of lifetime earnings



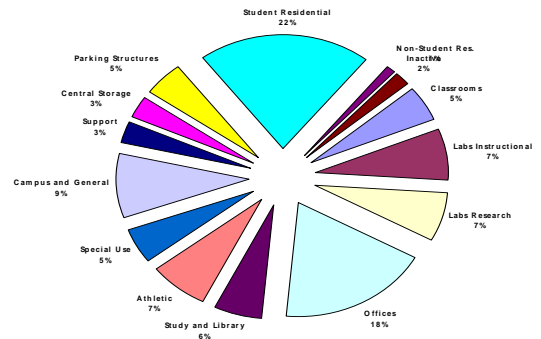
Transformational approaches



- Factors not entirely intrinsic. Include factors such as financial, family and circumstance – eg health (Yorke and Thomas, 2003; Burnett, 2006)
- 13 Propositions on how to improve student outcomes (Zepke et al, 2003)
- Importance of student services (Turner and Berry, 2000)
- Student and staff interaction and support (Nagda et al, 1998)
- Importance of learning communities in and out of the classroom



Where does learning take place?



Enhancing student success



- Emphasis on 1st year experience
- Commitment to student learning and engagement
- Proactive management of student transition
- Curriculum as an academic milieu
- Systematic monitoring of student achievement with action based on evidence
- Strong academic leadership

(Yorke and Longden, 2008)



Key aspects of UB strategy for student success



- Living and Learning Communities approach
- Student seminar
- Shift in emphasis through Learning and Teaching Policy from teaching to learning
- Massive shifts in the physical learning environment/use of social space etc
- Fostering community spirit
- A safe and secure environment



What does the institutional research tell us?



- 2006: Survey of new and first year students – *signalled issues*
- 2007: Focus group research of Year 2 students of their year 1 experience - *depth*
- 2007: Survey of Year 2 students of their whole Year 1 experience - *perceptual*



Year 1 and new student survey



[hyperlink 1.docx](#)



Importance of the early experience



- Academic registration
- Accommodation registration
- Orientation
- Student expectations of tertiary study

Persistence - in terms of motivation to learn and succeed - will be affected in some way by these early experiences



Focus group research study



- Perception Survey signalled early experience issues
- Wanted more qualitative/rich data to inform causes rather than just see symptoms
- 4 groups/31 students
- Incoming students 2007; 3 months following commencement



Findings



- Lack of service culture
- Not very friendly/unhelpful
- Discontinuity between information given and information expected
- Confusion about what courses to take
- Too quick decision-making expected
- Poor registration processes
- Bad timing for accommodation decisions
- Many did not participate/know about or participate in the induction/did not value the 1st year seminar

1. LACK OF CONGRUENCE WITH GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION
2. MAJOR CULTURAL SHIFT/CHANGE MANAGEMENT ISSUES SIGNALLED



2nd year student survey of their first year experience



- Survey carried out on 3,368 FT 2nd year students at re-registration August 2008
- 38% response rate
- Designed to capture student expectations and their levels of satisfaction of the first year experience
- Attempt to identify gap areas in the university's performance (from the students' point of view)



Expectations and satisfaction





- Two ratings
- 4 point Likert scales
- 1: very important/very satisfied
- 4: not at all important/not at all satisfied
- A high gap score indicates that expectations not being met
- Negative gap score that UB may be putting resources where they might not be needed (in fact, no negative gap scores)





Results chart





- 39 questions based on Zepke's 13 propositions and clustered around 7 key areas of activity:
 - Teaching, learning and assessment
 - Courses
 - Timetable and examinations
 - Campus
 - Facilities
 - Student support
 - Student diversity
- [hyperlink 2.docx](#)

 **Findings** 

- All UB activities show high levels of student dissatisfaction, some by around half of the student body
- Mismatch between stated strategy and events on the ground
- Compare to USA (Noel-Levitz Survey)
- UK (Yorke and Longden)
- Dearth of research on African universities (outside maybe RSA) although note University of Namibia research

 **Strategising – a way forward** 

Zepke's 13 propositions	The Challenge at UB	Strategy for Improvement
<p>Institutional behaviours, environment and processes are welcoming and efficient.</p> <p>hyperlink 3.docx</p> <p>The institution provides opportunities for students to establish social networks.</p> <p>Academic counselling and pre-enrolment advice are readily available to ensure that students enrol into appropriate programmes and papers.</p> <p>Teachers are approachable and available for academic discussions.</p> <p>Students experience good quality teaching and manageable workloads.</p> <p>Orientation/induction programmes are provided to facilitate both social and academic integration.</p> <p>Students working in academic learning communities</p>	<p>Students have highlighted the barriers to their assimilation into the institutional culture. There is a discontinuity between the information they need, the advice they are given on courses, timetable clashes and a perceived poor induction process. Accommodation services are below student expectations. Food services are considered poor.</p> <p>Students have high expectations for social and sporting facilities and events.</p> <p>Students are concerned that they are given inadequate advice on enrolment for courses, and that they sometimes end up on courses inappropriate to their employment needs. Nearly 40% of first year students are not satisfied with the availability of lecturers outside class-times. There is an over-reliance of students for lecturers to 'spoon-feed'.</p> <p>Inadequate feedback, timeliness of lecturers and the quality of instruction are perceived as problematic by students.</p> <p>Despite a policy in which student induction is encouraged, and the delivery of a First Year Experience Seminar, few students appear to view this as a means of social and academic integration. Over 70 percent of students felt that they were able</p>	<p>Induction processes should be strengthened. Re-sequence steps that address the issues raised by students in terms of admissions, accommodation registration, orientation and academic registration. Improve physical signage on campus. Assure technology for both on and off-line registration.</p> <p>Provide refectory information, with flexible meal plans. Improve quality of catering services. Improve warden system.</p> <p>The University has committed to expansion of its sporting facilities and to enhancing social activities and space for students in its new Strategic Plan (2008). New student accommodation will integrate social and learning spaces more extensively.</p> <p>Improved pre-enrolment advice and guidance is necessary.</p> <p>Develop strategies for student nurturing by teachers. Integrate resident tutoring into the Living and Learning Communities Strategy. Develop student learning strategies that foster independent learning.</p> <p>The University has adopted a new Learning and Teaching Policy (2008). This will require close monitoring and significant investment in change management.</p> <p>The delivery of induction processes at both institutional and faculty levels should be reviewed and improved. The impact of the First Year Experience Seminar should be researched. The University needs to build on this work, which is</p>

 **Conclusion** 

- Importance of the 1st year experience
- Importance of researching it
- Importance to strategise around the results
- Institutional willingness to face up to the challenge
- Change
- Implementation